Synopsis for

CLASSIC FRANCE: POSTAL HISTORY OF THE CERES AND NAPOLEON ISSUES OF 1849-1875

Scope and Presentation The aim of this synoptical exhibit is to show the breadth of usage of the French Ceres and Napoleon Head definitive issues of 1849 through 1875 excluding those issued for use only in the colonies. The domestic rates for letter mail, circulars and periodicals and registration and postage due are all present, along with scarce to rare military and foreign mail uses.

Emphasis has been placed on scarce to very rare usages, destinations and frankings. The most significant items are matted on a rose background. Other important items are matted on a grayish blue background.

This was a very turbulent period with the Crimean War of 1855-56, the failed attempt to make Maximillian emperor of Mexico in 1861-65 and the Franco-Prussian War and occupation of 1870-72. There were military bases and expeditions in Italy, in the Caribbean, South America, Africa, Southeast Asia, China, and Oceania. All are shown.

The merchant web of the Middle East and Mediterranean had numerous French foreign postal bureaus from the Black Sea through Turkey, Syria, and Egypt to Algeria. Worldwide commercial growth prompted other bureaus and offices in Japan, Shanghai, Indian Ocean islands, the Caribbean and South America. The growth of French maritime routes rivalled those of Britain and Germany as one of the world's leading mail carriers.

The presentation of this wonderfully complex era is divided into four main parts and those into chapters. The main parts are Domestic Mails, Franco-Prussian War, Uses Abroad, and Foreign Mails. Domestic Mails are divided into Rates and Frankings, Registered Mail, Postage Due and Unusual Uses. Franco-Prussian War has The Siege of Paris, Balloon Mail, Boules Moulins, The Commune, and The Occupation of Alsace-Lorraine. Uses Abroad starts with Military Mail, then Bureaus, Consulates and Agencies. The Foreign Mails is divided into Destinations and Rates and then Mixed Frankings. (both shown by continents and then alphabetically).

Balance These selected items are from a much larger collection. The exhibit is designed to provide a representative view of postal history during the period. A special effort has been made to find and show better and more elusive items. The emphasis has been placed on showing more significantly different items rather than all the depth of any single area and shows the varied usages of the 27 years of these definitive series.

For these reasons and to present the most worldwide material, the balance is tilted in favor of uses abroad and the foreign mails, especially exotic destinations and very scarce to rare mixed frankings. Covers to non-French places such as Sierra Leone, Basutoland, St. Helena, Singapore and New Zealand are extremely difficult to find in this period.

Philatelic Knowledge This exhibit could not have been acquired and presented before the exhibitor learned from a wide variety of references. Many different aspects of the history of France and its outward reach in the 19th century shaped its postal system. It is not possible to know what can be collected without knowing that history. Understanding is needed of the push to colonization and the political, commercial, and maritime networks in an era of trade expansion unmatched except by Spain and Britain in the 1500-1875 period. Clear rate information has sometimes required many sources to verify exceptions. Special commercial foreign rates are not all reported.

There are differences in the stamp issues, their major and minor types and their differing methods and problems of production. Numerous books and auction catalogs had to be consulted written in English, French, Spanish and German not only as to the European posts of the time but also the posts and maritime routes of the Middle East, Far East and those which developed to serve the Caribbean, South America and the rest of the world.

Difficulty of Acquisition The covers were acquired over the last 37 years from dealers and auction houses in France, U.S., Germany, Switzerland, Spain, England, Hong Kong, Japan, and Argentina. For many items, ten or less of the use or type are recorded. For example, the 1849 one franc vermillion on a price list is one of only two recorded and was acquired in Argentina. The 80 centimes strip of three with a tete-beche stamp is one of only three recorded and the first issue tete-beche pair is also very rare.

The French-Swiss mixed franking from Shanghai is the only one recorded and was bought in Hong Kong. The Venezuelan-French mixed franking with the Venezuelan bisect is the only one recorded and one of only three of that bisect. The balloon post cover forwarded from France to Constantinople is one of only two known. Intact newspapers and circulars were not often kept and are very hard to find in fine condition.

The first day usage of the first stamp on January 1, 1849 is very difficult to find from a small town while even Paris, Lyon and Marseille are very scarce. All early uses and first days of rates in domestic postage, other than those of the September 1871 rate change, are very scarce to rare. September 1, 1871 covers are very elusive with mixed issues. While many of the cancellations from the French agency and consular post offices shown are scarce to very scarce, the example shown with the cancellations of two different offices is one of only four recorded. The Degron marking on the Franco-Japanese mixed franking is one of only seven recorded. There are less than 20 recorded uses of the first issue postage due stamps on cover with a regular issue.

Three color frankings are scarce, four color frankings are very scarce and the five color mixed franking of France and Greece is the only one recorded. Uses of the 5 Franc Napoleon range from very scarce to rare, especially in the foreign mails as shown here.

Market competition is substantial because all the used abroad and foreign mail covers are sought after by those who collect those areas outside France. Obviously every mixed franking cover is attractive to those who collect the other country. Military and Levant postal history are also widely sought after as are all maritime mails.

Recognition: This exhibit received 5 gold medals and 3 APS Medals of Excellence (Pre-1900) at WSP shows in 2005-06, Reserve Grand at CHICAGOPEX 2006, and then was greatly improved and won 5 more golds, 5 special awards and 2 APS medals.

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